



PRAIRIE SPIRIT TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

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October 5, 2018

Dear PSTA Members,

On September 20th, 2018 the PSTA Executive met with the Honourable Gord Wyant, Minister of Education. Our conversation was frank, honest, and focused on meeting the needs of all students in Prairie Spirit. We told Mr. Wyant that students in Prairie Spirit continue to feel the negative effects of inadequate funding.

In preparation for this meeting, the PSTA Executive invited members to share stories, questions, or feedback. We received many stories that illustrated the need for increased funding and interministerial support. With the help of Ian Hanna, STF Director of Government and Stakeholder Relations, our Executive used these stories to draft a script that served as a guide in our conversation with Mr. Wyant.

Important themes emerged from the stories we received. The most concerning theme, and the one we discussed first in our conversation, was health and safety in schools. Our members shared stories of students, teachers, and support staff finding themselves in unsafe situations, primarily due to a lack of human resources. In these instances, a lack of people, time, or proper training created unsafe learning and working conditions.

Our Executive connected these stories to the gap between the increasing needs of students, and insufficient levels of professional and para-professional staff. We asked Mr. Wyant what he would do to address unsafe learning and working conditions, and how he plans to implement interministerial supports for students. Mr. Wyant acknowledged the increasing diversity of students' needs, and said that he is engaged in conversations regarding the sharing of resources from other sectors.

Our Executive then focused the conversation on the lack of support for students who require the help of an educational associate, special education teacher, or learning support services professional. We shared stories from teachers who have inadequate support in meeting the diverse needs of their students. These teachers must divide their time among students who require intensive support, knowing that this approach is more survival strategy than sound pedagogy. We expressed the frustration teachers feel when they are not supported in meeting the needs of all students.

Mr. Wyant again mentioned that conversations about resourcing the education sector are underway, but he also expressed a concern, shared by his colleagues, that resources are not filtering down to the classroom. He mentioned that he plans to ask for a substantial

increase in resources this year, but needs to be able to show tangible results. How would more money improve grade three reading scores and graduation rates?

We informed Mr. Wyant that, in Prairie Spirit, we have seen a decrease in division office staff, as resources have been redirected to classrooms; however, this has created gaps in service for students, teachers, and administrators. We told Mr. Wyant that last year's partial restoration of the money taken from education was used in Prairie Spirit to "stop the bleeding". For example, Prairie Spirit added a counsellor position to attend to acute and serious situations across the division. This position may not have a significant impact on graduation rates, but it will be extremely important for those who need such support. Furthermore, we shared our belief that we know intuitively, without looking at reading scores and graduation rates, that funding public education will have a positive impact on students. We plan to gather more examples of how increased funding would benefit our students, and will send these examples to Mr. Wyant.

Mr. Wyant then asked what the Ministry can do to increase new teacher retention rates. He wanted to know what school divisions and the Ministry are asking of teachers that is not helpful. We used this opportunity to shift the conversation to the lack of curriculum renewal, resources, and rollouts. In the past, the Ministry provided in-service prior to the implementation of new curricula, along with teaching resources to support implementation. Currently, many curricula are out of date, teachers have little support in implementation, and the resources page of the curriculum website is sparse. Consequently, teachers spend their own time and money securing resources the Ministry should provide. We plan to compile a more complete answer to Mr. Wyant's question by consulting with our membership and gathering more examples of nonessential demands on teacher time.

We also shared our concerns regarding the lack of teacher representation in strategic planning. Teachers are best positioned to speak to the learning needs of students in Saskatchewan, yet we are excluded from the Provincial Leadership Team (PLT), and only received 30 seats at the upcoming Ministry of Education strategic planning summit. Mr. Wyant agreed that teachers are an important partner in the education sector, and that more needs to be done to rebuild the relationship between teachers and government. We will follow up with Mr. Wyant regarding the Ministry's efforts to rebuild the relationship with teachers, and include teacher representation in strategic planning.

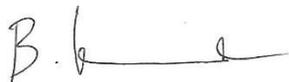
Before concluding our meeting, we asked Mr. Wyant what he will do to invest in education. Mr. Wyant said that he was sincere in his commitment to improving the education sector, and that he stands by the education platform he used in his bid for leader of the Sask Party. He noted that government moves slowly, and he has only been Minister for seven months, but believes in the importance of investing in education. We expressed our interest in a second meeting after the spring budget to discuss what progress has been made by that time. We also plan to continue our correspondence with Mr. Wyant by gathering detailed answers to the questions he asked of us, and by sharing more examples of the need for increased funding in classrooms.

We left Mr. Wyant with the message that things are not well in the education sector: the status quo is unsustainable, students' needs are not being met, and teachers are burning

out trying to compensate for the lack of funding. We expressed our gratitude for the opportunity to converse, and our hopes that this meeting was a small step in the right direction.

Thank you to the PSTA Executive for your leadership, advocacy, and professionalism in representing our membership, and thank you to those members who shared their stories with us. We made the most of this unique opportunity to make Mr. Wyant aware of the realities of classrooms in Prairie Spirit, and we will continue our correspondence with him to ensure our message is clear.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Knowles". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Brian Knowles
President
Prairie Spirit Teachers' Association